

Big builder

Local kid builds snow fort

A3



Smooth trails

Local snowmobile trail reports

B6



# International Falls Journal

ifallsjournal.com



Find us on Twitter



Find us on Facebook



Scan for The Journal online

Saturday, February 28, 2015

International Falls, Minnesota

www.ifallsjournal.com

\$1



## EARLY START LEADS TO BIG GAINS

Joseph Krause, left, and his brother, Harold, stack blocks in Mandi Baron's preschool classroom Wednesday at Falls Elementary. Educators say through play, children can develop social and cognitive skills, mature emotionally, and gain the self-confidence required to engage in new experiences and environments.

### District prides itself in investing early

BY EMILY GEDDE  
Staff Writer

Of the more than 20 years Missy Walls has been teaching, this year more than most has been a year of change, progress and rewarding results.

For the first time in Walls' career and at Falls Elementary, all-day preschool programs for 3- and 4-year old students have been offered since September, and so far, she said, it is a success.

For someone who refers to herself as "a little old-school" when it comes to teaching, Walls admitted she was skeptical of the all-day offering at first, but looked at the opportunity as a new adventure. Six months later, any doubt she had is completely gone.

"I didn't know how the kids, especially 3-year-olds, would adapt to an all-day program," she said. "But it has been better than I ever imagined."

The students are naturals at handling lunchtime, the bus schedule, and have even given up afternoon naps for a quiet break, Walls said. And, above all, they are advancing socially and academically.

"At the beginning of the year, I had some non-verbal children," Walls said. "Now they're talking. It's so rewarding to watch them grow. They'll be ready for kindergarten, but might not have been without this extra push."

Preschool to A7 >



STAFF PHOTOS BY EMILY GEDDE

Students in Missy Walls' all-day preschool from left are: Alyssa Wolden, Carter Line, Mara Buller, Krista Crandall and Oliver Larson. The children and their classmates spent Wednesday playing a game to help them identify different objects, count to 20, and recite their first and last name.



Liam Peterson sorts blocks in his preschool classroom Wednesday afternoon.

## Graduation rates continue to climb

BY SPENSER BICKETT  
Staff Writer

More Minnesota high school students are hearing the notes of "Pomp and Circumstance" on graduation day and getting their diplomas, according to a report from the Minnesota Department of Education.

The MDE reported this week, 81.2 percent of students statewide in 2014 graduated from high school, up from 79.8 percent in 2013. In addition, every student group showed an increase from the previous year.

"It is incredibly heartening to see our graduation rates continue on an upward trend," Education Commissioner Brenda Cassellius said in a release. "Over the past four years, we have doubled down on our efforts to better support students on their path from K-12 to career and college, and these data show it is working. This is a testament to all of the dedicated educators through Minnesota who make it their mission every single day to ensure all students have the chance to succeed."

Students have shown increases in graduation rates every year since 2011, and this year's

progress moves Minnesota closer to its statewide goal of a 90 percent graduation rate by 2020.

### International Falls

Locally, Falls High School showed a graduation rate of 81 percent, right in line with the state average. Superintendent Kevin Grover said he "was hoping for a little higher" graduation rate in 2014, after a 91 percent rate in 2013.

"In 2013 it was higher than in years past, so I was hoping it would continue," Grover said. "It dropped back down to where we've been, so I was surprised but not totally shocked."

Dating back to 2010, the average graduation rate at FHS is 83.4 percent.

In order to increase the school's graduation rate, Grover said the school needs to continue forging closer connections with families in order to prevent dropouts. Of the 90 students in the 2014 graduating class, 73 graduated while 6 dropped out.

"We want all kids to work through the school system, graduate, and become productive members of society," Grover said.

Graduation to A7 >

### L-BF ALL SCHOOL REUNION

## Reunion: Changing it up this year

BY LAUREL BEAGER  
Editor

Former Littlefork-Big Falls School students will see new offerings when they gather for the eighth All School Reunion in June.

The reunion is planned for June 25-27 in Littlefork.

The all-school reunions are planned to give former L-BF students the chance to reconnect with old friends and make new ones, said Dale Peterson, one of several event organizers.

"And it's a big boost to the community economically and actually to the whole area," he said.

Alumni returning to the community fill up lodging establishments around Borderland during the reunion, he said. Peterson serves as chairman of the Budget and Finance Committee of the larger All School Reunion Committee.

People attending this year's reunion may be surprised by the offerings, he said.

"It will be a little different presentation this time around, but I think the alumni and the general

public are ready for something a different," Peterson said. "We need to change it up every so often."

This year's reunion will offer alumni and the general public some different offerings than at past all-school reunions, Peterson said.

In other years, eight or nine speakers have been planned, but this year's event will feature one keynote speaker, L-BF Superintendent Chris Bachmeier, and lots of cash drawings and other activities.

In addition, the committee is developing a skit and a video that enlisting the help of current school staff and students.

"The video, I think, will go back as far as 1940 with excerpts from the annual and background music from each decade," Peterson said. The video will play at different events during the reunion.

Peterson said attending the activities isn't just for L-BF alumni.

"We're inviting the whole area to come, dance and do

Reunion to A7 >

INSIDE  
TO REACH US

OUTDOORS/A4  
PHONE: (218) 285-7411

OBITUARIES/A6  
FAX: (218) 285-7206

OPINION/A8

SPORTS/B1

CLASSIFIEDS/B3

COMICS/B5

ONLINE: IFALLSJOURNAL.COM OR FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK

VOLUME 6  
NUMBER 18

Primary Care - All patients welcome

International Falls Clinic | 218.283.9431 | Same day appointments available



Essentia Health  
Here with you